THE BRITISH EMPIRE

BBC tv TIME-LIFE BOOKS 25p
98 Weekly parts No. 29

Buckets of Diamonds

The Precious Pebbles of Kimberley

Australia & New Zealand 70c South Africa 70c Canada 95c

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98 Weekly parts Vol. 3. No. 29

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Published by Time-Life/BBC.

Printed in England by Jarrold and Sons Ltd. Norwich.

BY THE WAY

Several readers have asked whether we intend to produce an index. We do. It will make up the last issue of all, along with a full contents list, and its thousands of entries will provide an indispensable key to the whole history.

This week's issue is largely concerned with the beginning of South Africa's diamond industry, which now provides about 90 per cent of the world's total supply. From the Kimberley Mine have come some of the world's largest and most brilliant gems: two qualities that are, historically, strangely matched. For a diamond to display its true brilliance, it has to be cut – which diminishes its size. Since accurate diamond cutting developed only in the mid-18th Century, the earlier legendary diamonds – which came from the Golconda mines in southern India – were at best rough cut. They were valued, not for brilliance, but for hardness. The Koh-i-noor, for instance, acquired by the East India Company in the early 19th Century, originally weighed about 186 carats. Cutting reduced it to 106 carats.

India produced many great stones, with names that sound like a collection of thoroughbred racehorses: The Pitt, Akbar Shah, The Nizam and Great Table. None of them match in size or value (after cutting) South Africa's massive Cullinan, which was more than three times the size of any other diamond. Its story is told in this issue.

SPECIAL OFFERS

After the last of the special offers – available only to readers of THE BRITISH EMPIRE – appeared in Issue 18, we received many letters asking for further opportunities of this sort. As a result, we are happy to announce that we have chosen a few additional items, which will be made available to our readers. The first will be announced in Issue 36.

As before, all items offered will be of very high quality, and at a cost providing a considerable savings over their normal retail prices. Therefore, your regular order for THE BRITISH EMPIRE will now represent an even greater value.
N.B. All offers available only in the U.K.

All letters please to: **The British Empire, 76, Oxford Street, London W.1.**

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Cover: This remarkable photograph of uncut diamonds worth many thousands of pounds gives some idea of the variety of colours and shapes in which these precious pebbles occur.

BUCKETS OF DIAMONDS

By Timothy S. Green

The discovery of diamonds in South Africa in 1869 transformed a poor colony into a dazzlingly rich one, revived the simmering antagonism between Britain and the Boers – and produced a genius who acquired a good part of the wealth

To the 15-year-old boy Erasmus Jacobs the glittering stone that caught his eye as he strolled along the bank of the Orange River one day in 1866 was no more than a *mooi klip* – a pretty pebble.

Erasmus pocketed the pebble and when he got back to De Kalk, his father's farm near Hope Town in the north of Cape Colony, he gave the bauble to his little sister to add to the collection she used to play the children's game called "five stones." A few weeks later the Jacobs children were playing with the stones when Schalk van Niekerk, a local divisional councillor, came by. The bright pebble caught his eye and, perhaps suspecting it might be a diamond, he asked if he might keep it. Shortly afterwards he showed it to a passing peddler, John O'Reilly, who also guessed it might be a diamond because he could scratch his name on glass with it. He offered van Niekerk a few pounds for it, and dispatched it by ordinary mail to the government mineralogist, Dr. Guybon Atherstone, at Grahamstown, down near the coast. Dr. Atherstone promptly replied "it has blunted even jeweller's files here."

Indeed it was a diamond of 21¼ carats (about one-eighth of an ounce). The diamond was sent to Cape Town, where Sir Philip Woodhouse, the Governor of Cape Colony, bought it for £500, and arranged for it to be displayed at the Paris Exhibition of 1867 – a tantalizing foretaste of the riches that would transform South Africa from a poor neglected colony into one of the richest prizes of the British Empire.

Previously, Cape Colony, together with the other British colony of Natal and the two Boer republics of the Orange Free State and the Transvaal, had been the homes of only a handful of British and Boer farmers who eked out an existence. The Cape had a deficit approaching a million pounds and precious little industry that might help reduce it. There was one short railway line of 63 miles from Cape Town to Wellington and a seven-mile spur from Durban to the coast in Natal. Telegraph lines did not penetrate inland, and the main means of communication with the interior was ox-wagon. Indeed, the prime importance of the Cape had

been as a staging post on the route to India. To many British secretaries of state the cost of maintaining a garrison for the Simonstown naval base and Durban was out of all proportion to their value, especially as the Suez Canal was due to open in 1869, thereby providing an ideal short cut to the East.

The discovery of diamonds just at that moment suddenly changed the colony from a liability to a brilliant asset. The essential incentive to modernize transport and communications, thus opening up the whole of southern Africa for development, had been found.

Surprisingly this first South African diamond aroused little excitement. A London firm did dispatch a geologist to the Orange River, but he reported there was no sign of diamond-producing gravel and concluded, curiously, that the diamond must have arrived at the Orange River in the crop of an ostrich (he did not venture to speculate *where* the ostrich might have first eaten the diamond).

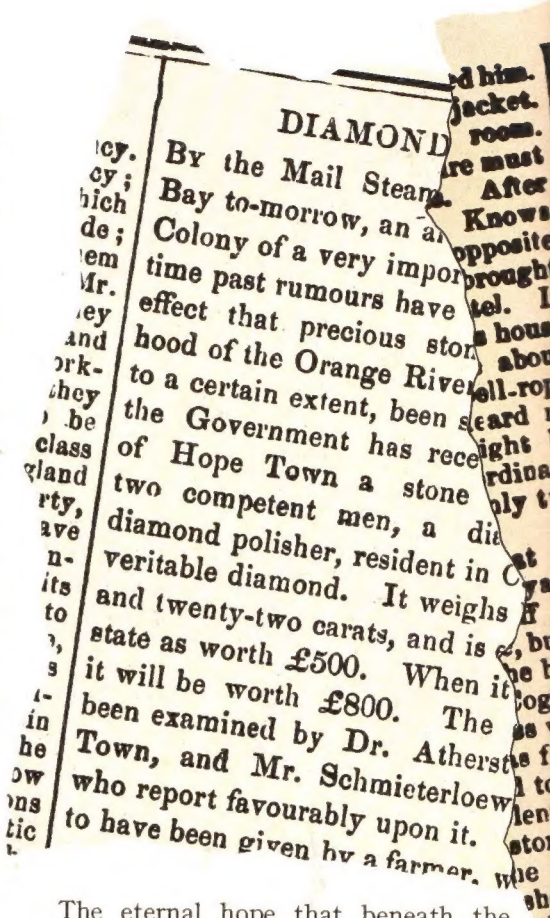
The ostrich theory was soon shot down; in 1869 the now-alerted Schalk van Niekerk came upon another diamond that had been found by a shepherd boy of the Griqua tribe, a people of mixed Hottentot and Boer ancestry on a farm near the Orange River. The new find was a superb white diamond of 85 carats, which was eventually sold to the Earl of Dudley for £25,000. In Cape Town, the Colonial Secretary, Sir Richard Southey, proudly laid it on the table before the the Cape Parliament, declaring: "Gentlemen, this is the rock on which the future of South Africa will be built." The diamond, appropriately, was named "Star of South Africa."

Suddenly the whole of Cape Colony was talking about diamonds, for others were swiftly found, not only along the Orange River, but in even greater profusion by the Vaal River a little further to the north. The new discoveries were just within the borders of the Transvaal and the Orange Free State, which had been created an independent state after the Great Trek of 1834. Within weeks everyone seemed headed for the fields, with highly romantic notions of what they would find. "They saw in their lively imaginings," said one contemporary, "diamond fields glittering with diamonds like dewdrops in the waving grass or branches of trees along the Vaal River, and covering the highways and by-ways like hoarfrost."

But for those who made the journey, on-the-spot reality was far from idyllic. The first mining camps that mushroomed at Pniel and Klipdrift along the Vaal, could be reached only by a hard 700-mile slog from Cape Town on horseback or by ox-drawn wagon, or by a 500-mile journey over mountains from Durban or Port Elizabeth in Natal. "The roads," one digger lamented, "were rough trampled tracks, changing after a rainfall to beds of mire. Their tortuous courses rambled from settlement to settlement, or from farmhouse to farmhouse over the veld, and were often wholly lost in the shifting sands of the Karoo."

The rugged mining communities of a few hundred tents and corrugated-iron huts were scorching dust-bowls in summer and nasty frosty morasses of mud in winter. Food was high priced and diggers who were smitten with malaria had to nurse each other as best they could. Most diggers had little notion of what a rough diamond really looked like, even less how to find one. They set up tents haphazardly and started groping round in the sand and gravel. They first sifted through the gravel with simple sieves mounted on wooden rockers, then spread the remaining pebbles on a bench and sorted through them with a wooden scraper. If nothing much turned up, they moved on after a few days. The names of early mining communities such as Cawood's Hope, Forlorn Hope, Good Hope and Last Hope reflect the miners' aspirations and disappointments.

For every tale of frustration, there was one of good luck. One young man was said to have found a diamond on the earth floor of the church when he knelt down to pray. "An English gentleman," reported one visitor to the diggings, "having worked a claim for six months and found nothing, went home disgusted, giving away his claim. The man who got it found on the same day a fine diamond of 29½ carats before he had gone six inches deeper than his predecessor. I believe he was offered £2,500 for it."


DIAMOND

By the Mail Steam
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diamond polisher, resident in C
veritable diamond. It weighs
and twenty-two carats, and is
state as worth £500. When it
it will be worth £800. The
been examined by Dr. Atherst
Town, and Mr. Schmieterloew
who report favourably upon it.
to have been given by a farmer,

The eternal hope that beneath the next thin layer of gravel lay a fortune kept the diggers going through the worst privations "Men who set out to work in the morning, not knowing where their dinner was to come from, became richer than any member of their family had ever been before it was time for an eleven o'clock snack," reported Charles Payton, a correspondent sent from London by the then popular magazine *The Field*.

Until he struck a rich find the digger could live fairly economically, Payton added. "The digger must do all his own cooking, marketing and washing. A plain cookery book will be of much assistance to him." The cost of fitting out with a tent, bedding, tools and planks to make the sorting tables Payton estimated at about £30. Monthly expenses would be slightly more than £18, including a claim licence at ten shillings, wages for four Kaffirs – native workers – of thirty shillings each month, food and water at threepence a bucket. On top of this was the cost of buying a claim, but the more ruthless diggers simply took over or

"jumped" other claims if their owners had not kept up licence payments.

Important new discoveries sustained the excitement. In August 1870 diamonds were found on Jagersfontein farm, to the south of the early Vaal diggings and about 20 miles from the river. A month later more were found on Dorstfrontein farm near by. Scarcely were the diggers getting their shacks up there, when Cornelius du Plooy, who owned Bultfontein farm across the way, found a diamond in the plaster he was mixing to decorate his house. He promptly sold the farm for £2,000 as diggers came rushing in.

The real prize, however, was the Vooruitzigt estate of two Boer brothers Johannes and Diedrich De Beer, a mile or so from Bultfontein. Diamonds were found there in May 1871, and then, a couple of months later, in even richer abundance at a little hillock on the farm known as Colesberg Kopje. This second find was christened De Beers' "New Rush." Beneath the De Beers farm, it turned out, were two of the richest diamond deposits ever located in South Africa. These became known as the De Beers Mine and the Kimberley Mine.

AMONDS! DIAMONDS!!

NOTHER DIAMOND FOUND,

83½ carats!

HOPE TOWN.

The following extra to the *Colesberg Advertiser* eached us on Thursday, and was immediately issed as an extra to the *Cape Argus*:

18th March, 1869, 4·15 p.m.

The whole place, I mean the inhabitants, are in a great state of excitement. Schalk van Niekerk has just come in, and brought with him the largest diamond that has yet been found in South Africa. The gem weighs 83½ (eighty-three and a half) carats—first water —and is said to be worth between £25,000 and £30,000. Found *in* the Colony, somewhere below the "Kalk." Mr. Niekerk is the gentleman who was the finder of, or who brought to notice, the first diamond, which was sold to the Governor for £500. That brought in by him to-day, he purchased from the Hottentot or Kafir doctor, of whom we heard about a year ago, using it as a charm in his profession. Niekerk gave him 500 sheep, ten head of cattle, and a horse for it. I wonder what that fellow Gregory would say now, were he here. Perhaps in this instance it was also dropped by an ostrich (?)

19th March.

The diamond has just been disposed of to Messrs. Lilienfeld Brothers for £11,200 (Eleven Thousand Two Hundred Pounds Sterling.)

P.S.—This news is confirmed by dispatch from the Civil Commissioner of Hope Town.

A diamond of unusual symmetry and beauty reached the Colonial Office on Thursday morning, weighing 7·25 carats, and valued at £200.

Wonderful South African Diamond.

is a story this morning afloat in the It has just been told us by a lady, it just as we have heard it. A 'Reilly, a hunter, explorer, &c., f the Dr. Livingstone stamp, et quite so well known, in his North Country—somewhere e River, picked up a stone two since, which he thought had rkable about it, and brought m. It was shown to several d was at length sent down e of Grahamstown to b he lady told us, a lette rning's post from the t it is a Diamond and reat Eastern" will have a grand laugh at Now we quite expect that the us about the South African Diamond, as he did some time ago about the Orange River Serpent—but we have stated the report just as we have heard it.—Stranger things, however, have come to pass in the world than the discovery of Diamonds in South Africa.

An ecstatic 1869 South African press report (above) announcing the discovery of a huge gemstone eclipsed the sober accounts (right and left) of the first find two years before. Newspapers joyfully ridiculed a mineralogist, J.R. Gregory, who had denied the possibility of diamonds in the area.

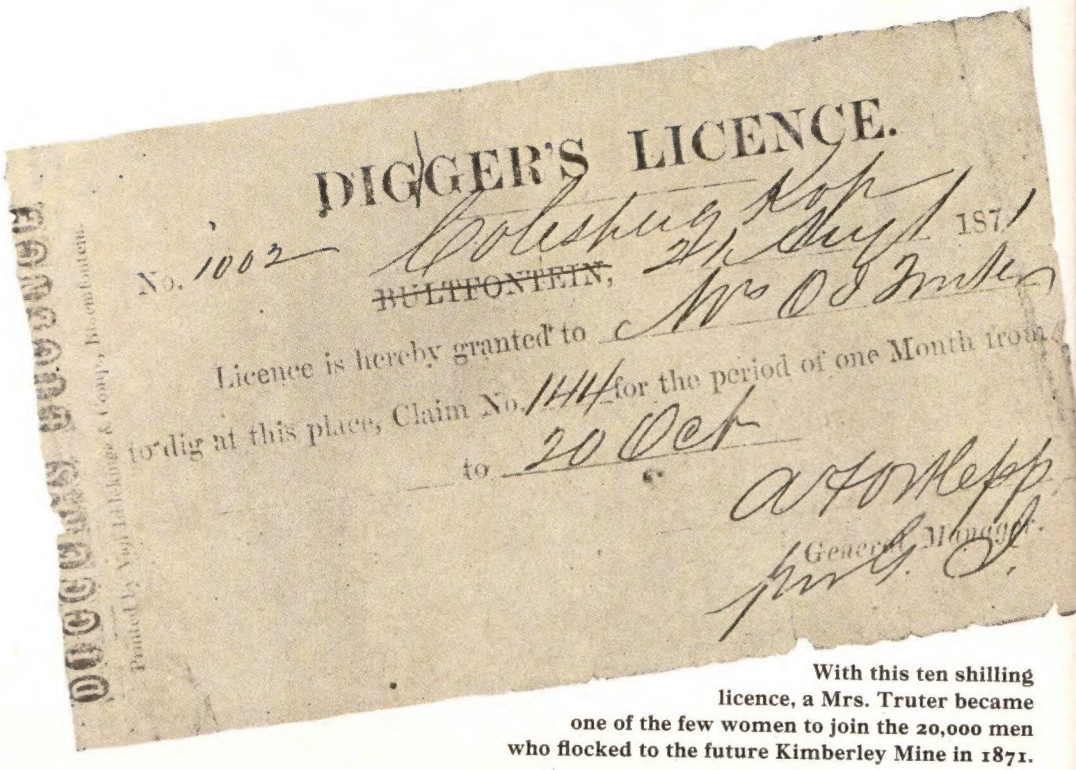
During the next 40 years the burrowings of diggers at the Kimberley Mine created the awesome Big Hole – a mile in circumference and the deepest open-pit mine ever dug by man, plunging down almost 1,300 feet into the depths of the earth. Today the Big Hole, now abandoned and half full of water, is the first stop for every visitor to Kimberley – a memorial to the incredible energy that men expended in dredging up wealth.

The De Beers brothers, however, did not wait to see all this deep digging; they sold Vooruitzigt, which they had bought for a mere £50 in 1860, for £6,000 to a Port Elizabeth syndicate and went off to farm quietly elsewhere (although they were known to admit sorrowfully in later years they might have done better to have agreed to sell for £6,000,000 rather than £6,000).

Colesberg Kopje, on Vooruitzigt, the scene of the "New Rush," was renamed Kimberley, after the British Colonial Secretary of the day, who said he could not spell either of those Dutch names, and it was anyway not dignified for any community in Queen Victoria's dominions to be known as De Beers "New Rush."

Kimberley, whose population skyrocketed to over 10,000, quickly took on the lusty, raucous atmosphere common to booming mine towns, with billiard-halls and bars, cheap hotels and canteens, a racecourse of sorts and the usual quota of con men. One crafty fellow named Champagne Charlie salted his claim with fake diamonds he had filed down from champagne-bottle bottoms, sold out fast at a profit and vanished. At Dodd's Bar the whisky and cigars were free for roulette and faro players. And a prostitute up from Cape Town auctioned herself before a lecherous crowd in a bar one night; a Dutch diamond buyer won her favours with a £25 bid. As they settled down in his tent, however, the lower bidders in the auction suddenly whisked away the canvas, to watch what they had missed securing for themselves.

Johannes De Beer sold for £6,000 the land which over the next 40 years yielded diamonds worth many millions of pounds.



With this ten shilling licence, a Mrs. Truter became one of the few women to join the 20,000 men who flocked to the future Kimberley Mine in 1871.

But compared with the violence and lynchings at the Californian and Australian gold-fields, the South African diamond rush was relatively peaceful. There were a few outbreaks of ruffianism in the camps, but occasional sprees were the chief disturbance.

The main problem was illicit diamond buying. Nimble-fingered workers at the diggings pocketed, palmed or swallowed diamonds when the boss's eye was turned, then sold them on the quiet to unscrupulous diamond buyers. In those early days security at the diggings was unknown and some estimates suggest that almost half the diamonds found were disposed of through under-the-table deals.

Diggers' Committees were established at all the main fields to enforce a simple set of rules and regulations. The first rule to be enforced was that no man might have more than two claims, each 31 feet square ("ten times the size of your grave," the diggers said). A favourite early punishment for breaking the Committee's rules was to drag the culprit back and forth through the Vaal River. More serious offences were sometimes punished by roping the offending digger, spread-eagled, to stakes driven into the ground, exposed to the burning sun for long hours.

By the end of 1871 the diggings were yielding at least £50,000 worth of diamonds a week. South Africa had easily outstripped Brazil, which had previously been the major diamond-producing country. By 1872 African production was six times that of Brazil; by 1880 20 times. Indeed, the colony effectively became diamond supplier to the world.

This flood of fine stones was just the

rejuvenation that the diamond industry, centred in London, Antwerp and Amsterdam, was desperately seeking. Brazilian output had been tailing off since 1860, while the demand for diamonds rose every year due to the new prosperity brought to Europe and America by the Industrial Revolution. The price for rough diamonds of up to one carat had increased from 300 gold francs in 1858 to 625 gold francs by 1869. The shortage of diamonds had even closed down many of the factories that had been built in Antwerp and Amsterdam during the early 19th Century to cut and polish the Brazilian gems.

Now suddenly, with the new flow of stones, there were barely enough experienced diamond-cutters to cope; their wages in 1871 were 13 times higher than in 1861. The great diamond merchants of Europe sent their representatives post-haste to Kimberley to open buying offices. The largest advertisement in the first issue of the *Diamond News and Vaal Advertiser*, published in Pniel in October, 1870 boldly announced that Mr. Wilhelm Schultz of Lippert & Co., with offices in Hamburg, Germany, begged to inform the public that he had opened a wholesale buying office. "Being in connection with the above well known Firm," read the advertisement, "who have their own Establishments in Europe, he ventures to say that he will be able to DEFY ALL COMPETITION." Many buyers clearly did handsomely; one European agent delightedly showed a visitor to Kimberley a whole hatful of diamonds he had just purchased. The poor colony which a year or so earlier had been of little interest to anyone had become the new Eldorado.

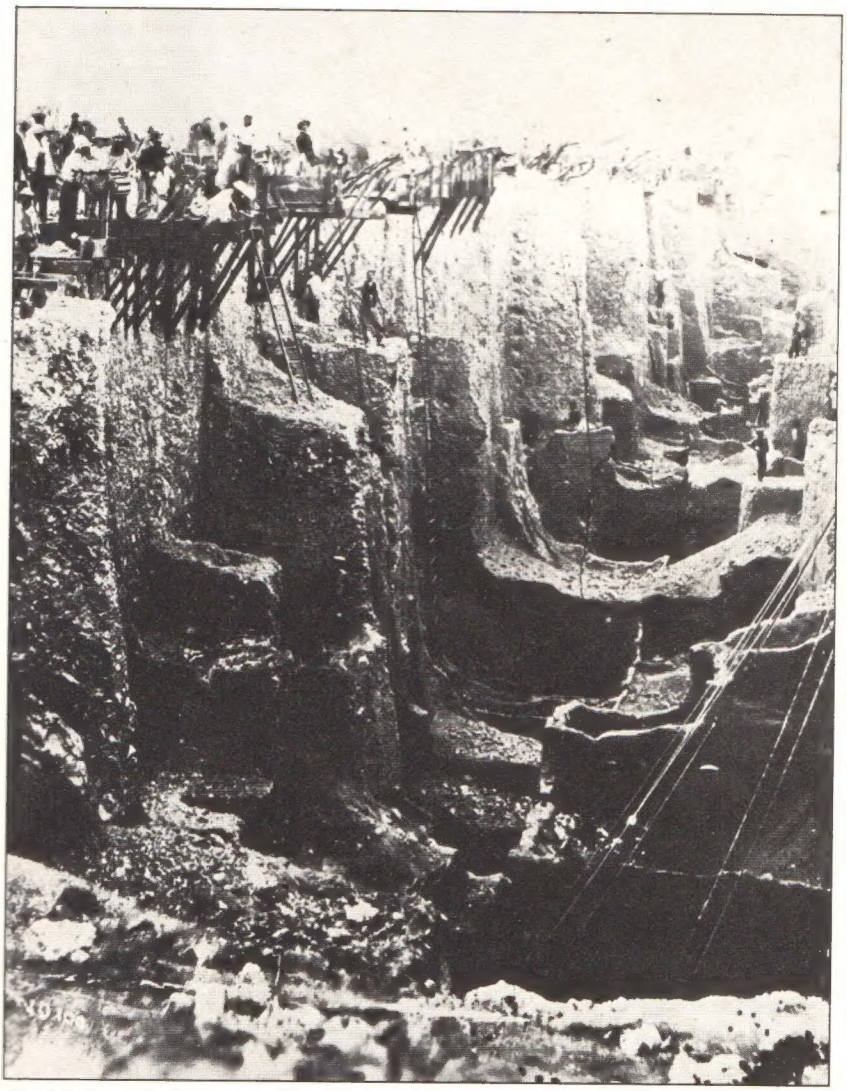
When the historian James Anthony Froude visited the diggings he found: "Diggers from America and Australia, German speculators, Fenians, traders, saloon-keepers, professional gamblers, barristers, ex-officers of the Army and Navy, younger sons of good family who have not taken a profession or have been obliged to leave; a marvellous motley assemblage, among whom money flows like water from the amazing productiveness of the mine."

Whatever their personal motives for journeying to Kimberley many of them would have agreed with the digger who penned in a romantic letter home: "A diamond stood for the making of history, for Empire and for unbounded wealth"

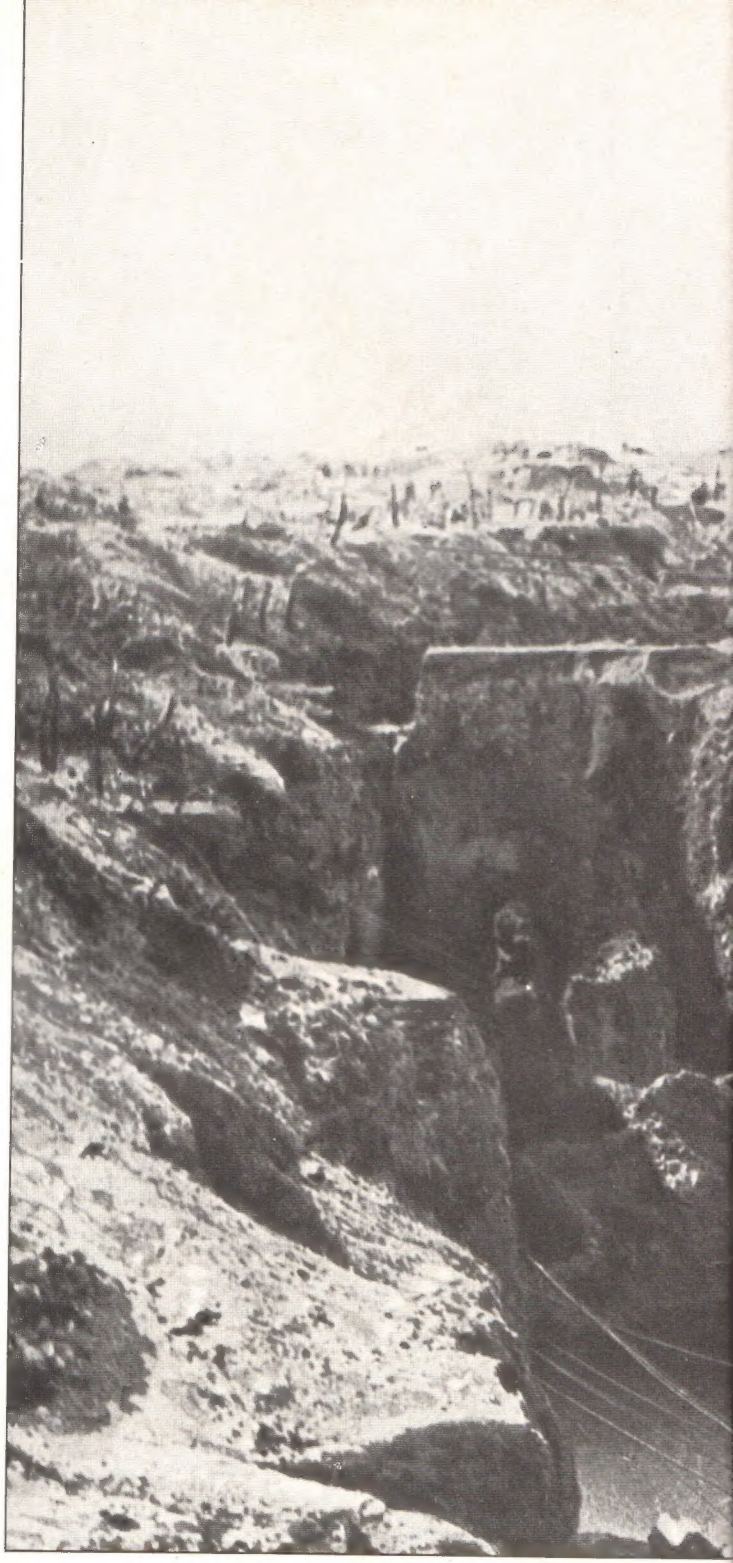
As mining got into its stride, exploration companies mushroomed along Kimberley's main street (a short section of which appears above) and representatives of Amsterdam, Paris and Hamburg diamond dealers (left) arrived in town to do business with the diggers.

THE BIG HOLE

One evening in July 1871 a young prospector named Fleetwood Rawsthorne packed his drunken native cook off to a moonlit hillock and ordered him to dig until he was sober. The man did more than clear his fuddled brain. He uncovered a diamond deposit that was to eclipse all others in South Africa; eventually it turned into the legendary "Big Hole" at the Kimberley Mine. Matching greed with technical ingenuity, diggers poured into the area and began to tear up the crumbly earth in a frenzied search for diamonds.



As claims sank deeper, pulley platforms were erected on the surface to haul up bucket-loads of the precious pay-dirt for careful examination and sorting.



The De Beers Mine, later to be richly exploited by Cecil Rhodes, was for a time almost abandoned when the Kimberley strike, with its prodigal profusion of stones, was made a mile away.

Enterprising merchants rushed wagon-loads of timber to the Kimberley Mine to meet the diggers' urgent demands for wood, needed for the construction of pulley platforms and for props to support the sides of the diggings.

After sieving the diamond-bearing soil, many diggers washed the material in hand-rotated drums to reveal the elusive stones.

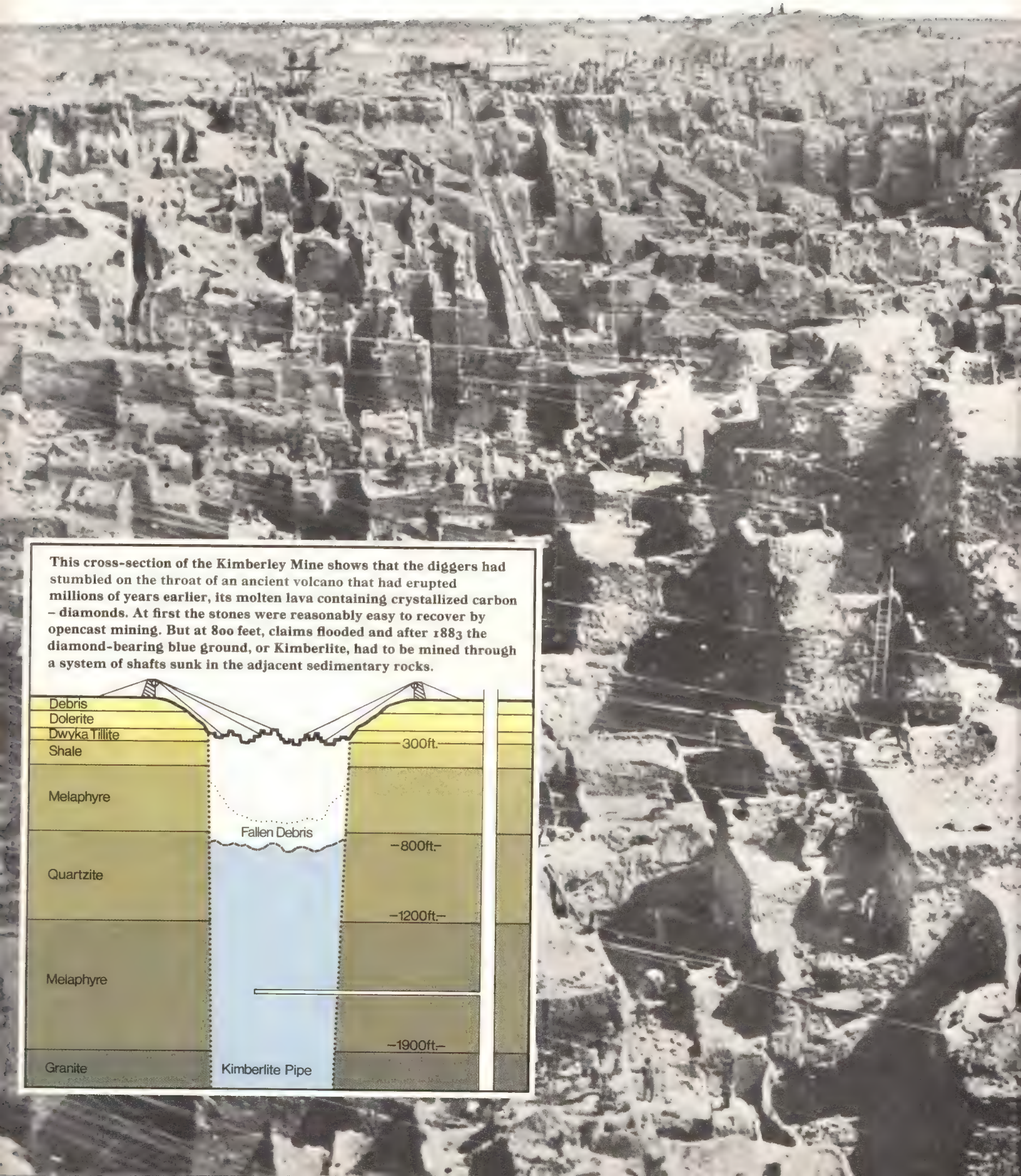
Diamonds for the Taking

The Kimberley Mine began to surrender its riches almost immediately. A Dutchman named Smuts who bought his claim for only £50 gathered £20,000 of diamonds in two months. Some men were even luckier. A few yards from the site of the original discovery a digger found a fine 175-carat diamond which he sold for £33,000. Soon a good claim could fetch anything up to £4,000, but only the first arrivals were able to scoop up easy fortunes just below the surface. Most diggers had to spade and pickaxe their way deep into the ground and hoist the soil up to native labourers who trundled it in wheelbarrows to the edge of the mine. There it was sieved and placed on tables to be sorted for the precious stones.

The over-eager diggers were generally at the mercy of buyers who rarely paid what a diamond was worth and often pretended to detect flaws in stones. But there was surprisingly little strife. Everybody was out to get rich quick in case the deposits petered out. Nobody need have worried. The best was yet to come.

Native labourers often took revenge for their miserable pay and poor treatment by stealing diamonds and selling them to illicit diamond buyers who hovered about the mine.

Two diggers at a rudimentary sorting table sift their way steadily through a pile of earth looking for the sparkling gems.



This cross-section of the Kimberley Mine shows that the diggers had stumbled on the throat of an ancient volcano that had erupted millions of years earlier, its molten lava containing crystallized carbon – diamonds. At first the stones were reasonably easy to recover by opencast mining. But at 800 feet, claims flooded and after 1883 the diamond-bearing blue ground, or Kimberlite, had to be mined through a system of shafts sunk in the adjacent sedimentary rocks.

A Honeycombed Crater

Towards the end of 1871 the Kimberley miners had dug down so far that they reached the end of the diamond-bearing yellow earth. They struck bedrock. Many, thinking the boom was over, abandoned their claims, but a few sophisticated diggers reasoned that the diamond-bearing soil was volcanic and of deep subterranean origin. Resolutely they dug on and found to their delight not only that the bluish-green rock was soft but that it weathered into the crumbly, yellow earth they had already encountered. Moreover this lower level was liberally strewn with rough diamonds.

Immediately there was a new rush to the old diggings. As claims plunged deeper and deeper the mine took on the appearance of a giant adobe settlement under the web of steel cables which linked claims with the surface.

The platforms at the mine's edge had three levels – the top for cables going to the centre of the crater, the middle and the bottom for cables progressively closer to the precipitous sides of the gaping, man-made crater.

The horizontal wheels or horse whims, which were introduced in 1874, were the first steps away from the early laborious methods towards truly mechanized mining.

Winning the Blue Ground

When operations began at the Big Hole, the diggers reached their claims simply by walking across the rough ground. Then with pick and shovel they started to work. But as the level of their diggings went lower and lower, it became necessary to construct inclined roadways over which the soil was carried in barrows.

The roadways soon became so steep that the task of bringing up the blue earth turned into a back-breaking job. And in time, the ramps that linked the claims to the lip of the crater began to collapse with such frequency that another method had to be devised. It was then that the great web of steel cables was spun from the edge of the crater down to the claims. Along these strands, bucketloads of earth were winched to a bank of platforms on the crater's edge.

It was an improvement, but the buckets were small and the windlasses that drew them along the cables had to be operated by hand. Soon men installed huge horizontal wheels known as horse whims, which were turned by horses or mules, freeing diggers to mine, to shore up the brittle walls of their claims and to sort the increased quantities of earth the whims hauled to the surface. Eventually, the multitude of cables began to hinder movement and made deeper mining operations difficult and dangerous.

A visitor to the mine in 1872 saw "thousands of half naked men, dwarfed to pygmy size scratching the face of the pit with their puny picks like burrowing gnomes." But like everybody who came to stare, it was the cables that impressed him most: "the whole face of the vast pit seemed to be covered by a monstrous cobweb, shining in the moonlight as if every filament was a silver strand."

Mining at the edge of the crater was plagued by persistent rock falls and diggers were for ever reinforcing the sides of their claims with sandbags.

PLAN OF OWNERSHIPS IN
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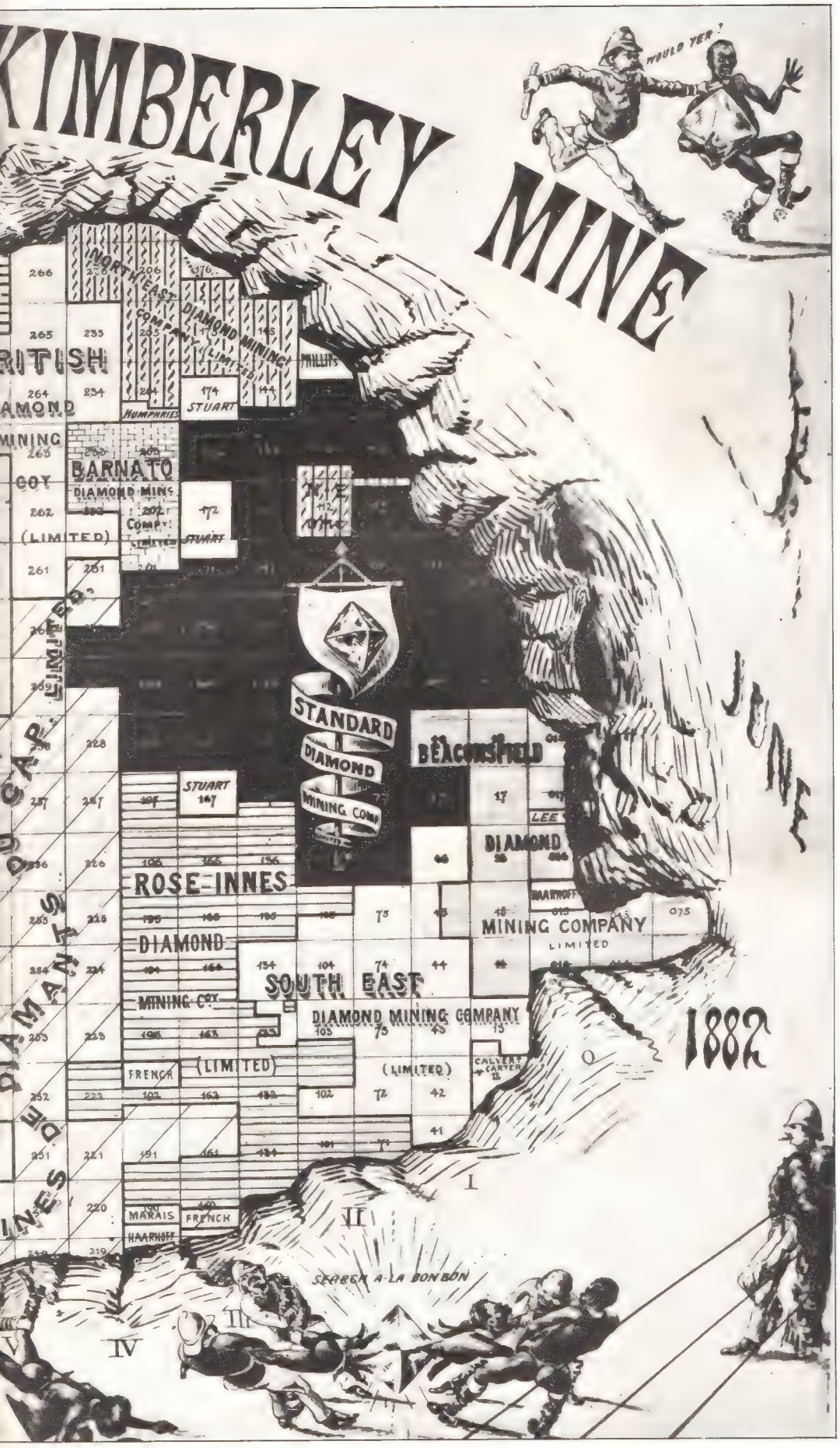
ROSZA VOLGIE
W. A. HALL
PROSSER
CAPE
DIAMOND
SOUTH-WEST
GATES
HALL
COMPAGNIE
MINING
COMPY
DIAMOND
MINING COY
(LIMITED)
FRANCAISE
PROSSER
O. J. SKILL
GEM
D.M.Co
(LIMITED)
UNSOPHISTICATED INNOCENCE



The Struggle for Control

About 800 feet down, the problem of working individual claims became almost insoluble. Water flooded the deeper pits and undermined their walls, while ever greater slabs of rock began to fall away from the rim of the mine. It became obvious that the mine could be saved only if teams of diggers were replaced by large companies rich enough to provide expensive machinery and large-scale administrative organization.

By 1882, when the ground plan on the left was drawn up, companies had completely superseded diggers. One enterprise, Barney Barnato's Kimberley Central Diamond Mining Company, dominated all others. Over the next five years it steadily absorbed surrounding competitors until in 1888 it was acquired by Cecil Rhodes and his De Beers Consolidated Mines. As a result of this takeover mining became even more efficient. It also paid better: a centralized administration could control the flow of diamonds to the markets of the world, and keep prices high. Underground mining, begun in 1883, was greatly expanded and the mine began to produce more diamonds and more wealth than ever before.

The light-hearted drawings that decorate this plan highlight the problem of illicit diamond buying that beset the diamond miners. It was very hard to prevent native labourers from smuggling stones out to unscrupulous buyers by swallowing them or hiding them in body orifices. The mine is estimated to have lost, at the very least, £3,000,000 a year through this form of theft.

The Pipe of Plenty

After Rhodes bought out Barnato for more than £5,000,000, the mine survived until August 4, 1914, when, at a depth of 3,610 feet mining became uneconomic. In the course of the previous 43 years men had removed 25 million tons of earth from the Big Hole and recovered at least 14,504,566 carats – about three tons – of diamonds. Among these stones were three of the world's most famous – the Tiffany, an orange-coloured brilliant of 287·42 carats; the Porter Rhodes, a blue-white octahedron of 153·50 carats; and the Kimberley, which after cutting was a flawless, champagne-coloured diamond of 50·09 carats.

Today the Big Hole, the largest man-made crater in the world, stands as an arresting monument to the pioneers of the modern diamond industry who carved it out of the veld in an unrelenting quest for personal fortunes. "All for the vanity of women!" exclaimed Winston Churchill's father when he visited the mine and saw a parcel of diamonds. "And the depravity of man!" added a woman. Kimberley catered for both.

At the De Beers' sorting office, uncut diamonds were graded for weight, colour and clarity.

This document – the largest sum ever paid by cheque to that time – is still carefully preserved, for with it De Beers Consolidated gained control of the great mine.

The abandoned, water-filled Big Hole is now a major tourist attraction. But it still contains diamonds and, if gem prices rose dramatically, it could be worked again.

II. The Great British Diamond Theft

Until the discovery of diamonds, few politicians either in Cape Colony or in Britain took the two infant Boer republics of the Transvaal and the Orange Free State very seriously. The Voortrekkers of the Great Trek had declared that they were withdrawing to these two locations "to preserve their purity." They had established their farms in isolated communities scattered across the veld; the largest town in the Transvaal, Potchefstroom, had a mere one hundred houses. The combined population of both republics was 45,000, compared with 200,000 in Cape Colony. The coffers of the republics were almost permanently empty; indeed the Postmaster-General of the Transvaal sometimes had to take his salary in stamps. But the Boers were quite ready to accept poverty and hardship, provided the British left them to their own way of life.

They were resentful of intruders, especially any foreigners who came in search of minerals. When an English mineralogist, John Henry Davis, found gold-bearing rock on the Witwatersrand in 1852 on the farm of a cousin of Marthinus Pretorius, President of the Transvaal, he was swiftly paid £600 for his samples and asked to leave. Later the Boers appointed their own mineralogist, Pieter Jacob Marais, to search for gold and other minerals, but they included in his contract a fearsome clause that if he did discover mineral wealth and mentioned it to any foreign government and "so causes the independence of the Republic to be disturbed or threatened in any way, such action shall be punished with the penalty of death and no extenuating circumstances will be taken into consideration." Such was the determination of the Boers to remain a free and independent people.

Suddenly, in 1870 their isolation vanished with the diamond rush. Klipdrift, one of the first boom towns, was on the fringe of the Transvaal; just across the Vaal River, in territory claimed by the Orange Free State, by Kimberley.

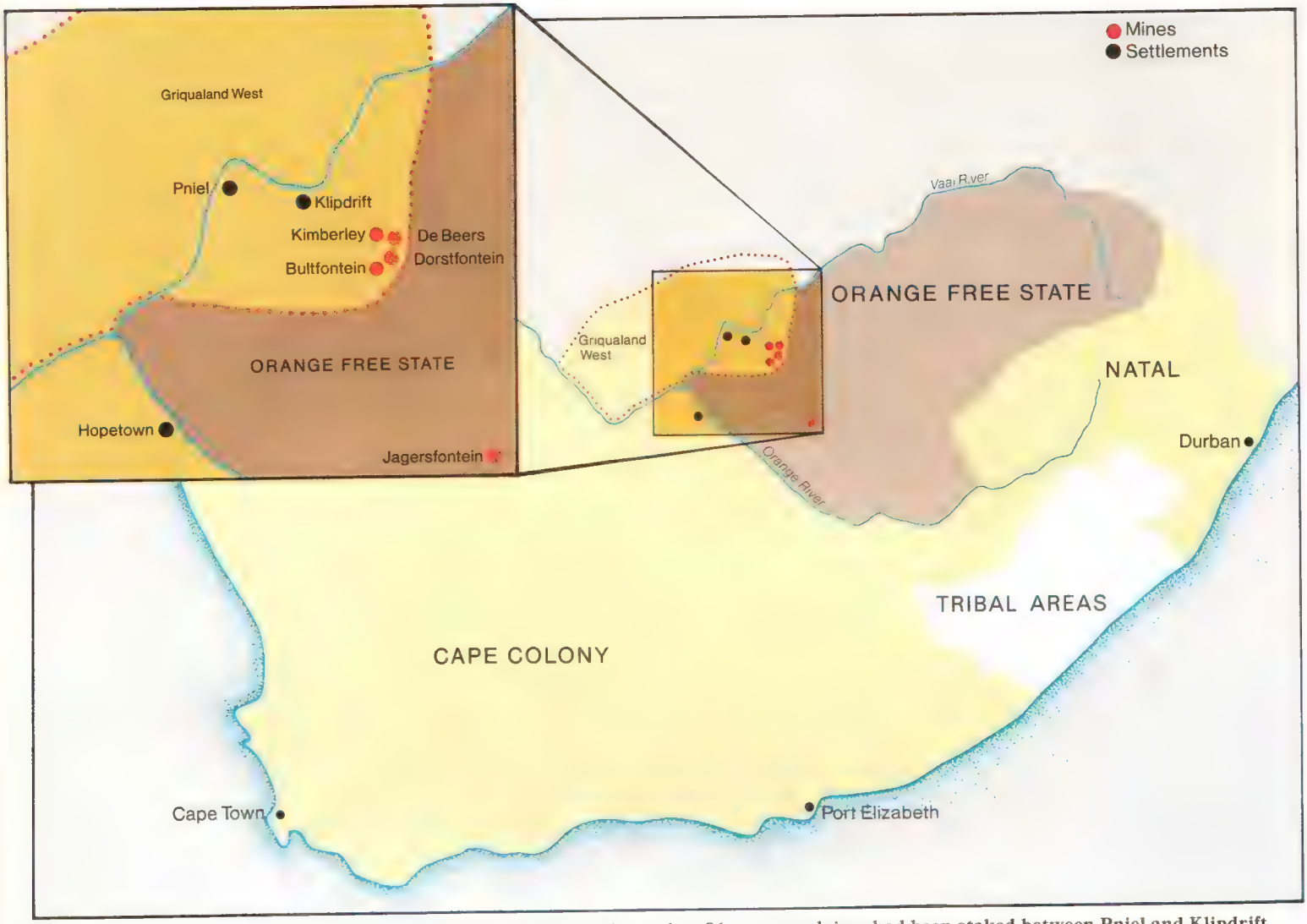
Both the Boer republics responded to the challenge of the diamond rush, but they lacked the manpower and the cash to make their authority firmly felt at the diamond-fields. President Jan Brand of the Orange Free State sent in a magistrate, Olaf Trüter, and a handful of police to try to maintain some order at the diggings. President Pretorius of the Transvaal acted more rashly. He declared that he was giving the exclusive rights to search for diamonds in the Transvaal to a small company of three men, in return for a royalty of 6 per cent. The diggers at Klipdrift greeted this proposal with derision. They promptly declared their own independence as the Klipdrift Republic, with a President, named Stafford Parker, a commanding figure who always wore a grey top hat and great frock-coat. President Pretorius marched towards Klipdrift with a small commando troop, but at the last moment decided not to challenge the new republic by force.

Stafford Parker, an imposing ex-sailor, became President of the shortlived Klipdrift Republic, formed by angry diggers after the Transvaal granted a 20-year prospecting monopoly to three favoured Englishmen.

President Brand of the Orange Free State protested that the British annexation of West Griqualand diamond-fields was a hostile act and he demanded that there be arbitration of the dispute by a foreign power.

Now the British authorities began to take an active interest in the diamond rush. Could the weak Boer republics provide the necessary law and order at the mining camps? Many politicians doubted it, especially as the majority of diggers were British and were clamouring anyway for British rule. Furthermore, for men like Sir Richard Southey, the Colonial Secretary at the Cape Colony, it was inconceivable that Britain should not have a stake in the richest diamond discoveries the world had ever known. The potential wealth from the mines could change the balance of power in southern Africa. Two penniless Boer republics had been no threat to British rule in Africa; two wealthy ones might be, especially as they would form a barrier right across Africa to the Kalahari Desert, thus cutting off direct British access from the Cape to Central Africa.

The British began manœuvring for possession of the diamond-fields. The loophole they discovered was that almost all the diamonds were on territory inhabited by the Griquas. Since it had never really mattered before, no one had ever worked out precisely whether this Griqua land belonged to the Boer republics. The British now set up a commission under Robert Keate, the Lieutenant-Governor of Natal, to "arbitrate" the issue. This action provoked an anguished plea by President Brand of the Orange Free State that a disinterested foreign power should settle the dispute. Keate's commission loftily refused to give way; the British have never liked to have their disputes settled by foreigners.



The first diamond rushes were centred on the Orange and Vaal rivers; by 1869, 10,000 claims had been staked between Pniel and Klipdrift. But these were eclipsed by the discoveries at the Dorstfontein and Bultfontein mines in 1870 and at the Kimberley and De Beers mines the following year. All mines were in areas under Orange Free State control, but Britain quickly extended the Cape Colony to snap them up.

Keate's decision was hardly surprising: the Boer republics, he announced, could not rule what was known as West Griqualand. And with equal consistency the Griquas' chief, Nicholas Waterboer, was persuaded to ask the British government to annex his land. British commissioners were sent in to establish law and order, and at the beginning of November, 1871 the Union Jack was run up over the diamond-fields.

President Brand responded by ordering out a commando force to retake the fields. However, faced by a thousand troops rushed up from Cape Town by the new Governor of the Cape, Sir Henry Barkly, Brand withdrew his Boers and sent them back to their farms. The Free State was later given £90,000 compensation for the loss of West Griqualand; a contemptible sum considering that diamond production there was worth between £2,000,000 and £3,000,000 every year. The Transvaal, on the other hand, did not receive a single penny and the loss of its share of the diamond-fields led abruptly to President Pretorius's fall from power.

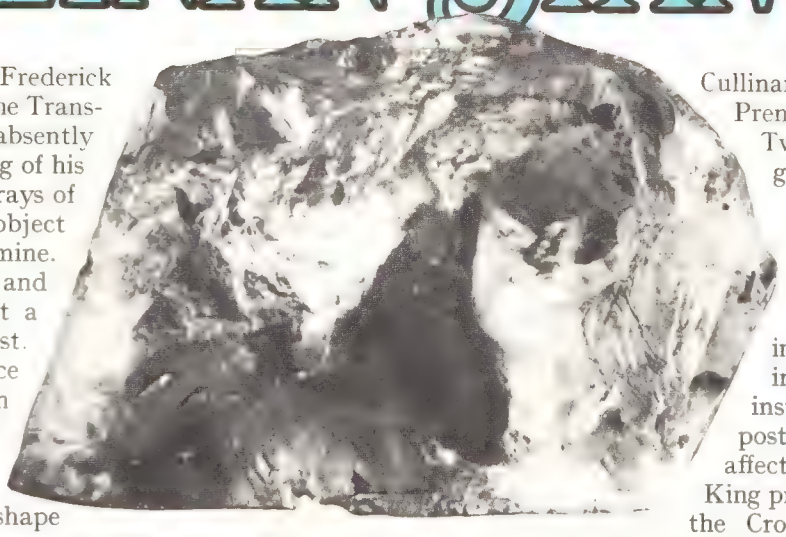
The Boers never forgot or forgave the British action over the diamond-fields, which, apart from challenging their precious independence, deprived them of massive revenues they could ill afford to lose. This was one of the bitter grievances that would lead to the outbreak of the Boer War 30 years later.

The attitude of the majority of the British politicians of the day, however, was probably best summed up by a novelist, Anthony Trollope, who visited the diamond diggings in 1877. "When we accepted the cession of the Province in 1871," he wrote, "the Free State was no doubt making an attempt to regulate the affairs at the Diamond Fields; but it was a feeble attempt. The Republic had not at its back the power needed for saying this shall be law, and that shall be law, and for enforcing the laws so enacted. History will justify us because it was eventually necessary that an English-

continued on p. 806

THE CULLINAN DIAMOND

As dusk fell on June 25, 1905, Frederick Wells, the surface manager of the Transvaal's Premier Mine was staring absently across the diggings and thinking of his dinner. Suddenly in the dying rays of the sun, he noticed a brilliant object flashing from the lip of the mine. Walking over to it he bent down and with a pocket-knife prised out a translucent stone as big as his fist. At first he thought it was a piece of glass put there to fool him. In fact it was a monster diamond of 3,106 carats or about $1\frac{1}{3}$ pounds, measuring $2 \times 2\frac{1}{4} \times 4$ inches. Moreover, its general shape and cleavage suggested that it was once part of an even larger gem. Wells was rewarded with £2,000 and the stone was christened the Cullinan diamond after Sir Thomas Cullinan, the man who discovered the Premier Mine.



The uncut Cullinan was the biggest diamond ever found. This is a model, shown full size.

Two years later the Transvaal government bought the gem for £150,000 and presented it to King Edward VII on his 66th birthday in November, 1907. To foil any attempts at theft on the way to England, a paste imitation was shipped under an imposing guard while the heavily insured diamond went by parcel post. Touched by the generosity and affection of the Transvaalers, the King promised to keep the stone among the Crown Jewels. He chose Joseph Asscher, a famous Amsterdam diamond-cutter, to transform the rough hunk into a series of beautiful jewels, some of which would embellish the royal crowns of England.

Joseph Asscher studied the Cullinan diamond for months before cleaving it (above). Finally on February 10, 1908, he placed a steel chisel in a groove on the stone and tapped it with a heavy rod – and broke the chisel. His second attempt split it cleanly. The story that Asscher then fainted was strenuously denied. The stone yielded nine major gems (left) and 96 small brilliants.

The late Queen Mary's crown displays two stones from the Cullinan diamond – the 94-carat Cullinan III at the top and the 63-carat Cullinan IV in the band at the bottom. The large stone between them is in fact a crystal replica that replaced the celebrated Indian Koh-i-noor after its transfer to the crown of Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother in 1937.

Mounted in the band of the Imperial State Crown is Cullinan II, the second largest cut diamond in the world, a 317-carat, 66-facet, cushion-shaped stone. The Crown, on display in the Tower, is used for state occasions like coronations and the opening of Parliament.

The Cullinan I, known as the "Star of Africa" – the largest cut diamond in the world – was incorporated into the Sovereign's Sceptre with the Cross. A 74-facet pear-shaped stone, it weighs 530 carats.

speaking population of a peculiarly bold and aggressive nature should be made subject to law and order."

Trollope added sanctimoniously, "British rule in distant parts, much as it is abused, is so precious a blessing that men will have it, and," he continued in a self-pitying phrase, "the old hen is forced to stretch her poor old wings again and still again."

Not everyone was so blinded by this romantic vision of the British Empire to overlook the irreparable damage caused by Britain's grab for the diamonds. Froude, the historian, had gone to South Africa expressly to look at the political consequences of annexation. On his return he told a lecture audience that the Boers still living in Cape Colony "took the injury to their kindred as an injury to themselves."

"The annexation of the Diamond Fields," said Froude, "whether it was a crime or not, has been a blunder. We have exasperated the whole Dutch population, we have quarrelled with the two free republics . . . we have broken a treaty; we have damaged our reputation for good faith."

In the same month that the Union Jack was hoisted over the diamond-fields, a tall auburn-haired young Englishman in baggy white cricket flannels came trekking over the veld, with a bucket and spade, a few volumes of the classics, a Greek lexicon and a box of cough lozenges (among other things) piled on an ox-wagon. His name was Cecil Rhodes; he was just 18 and many thousands of miles from the quiet vicarage at Bishop's Stortford in Hertfordshire where he had been born in 1853, the fifth son of the Reverend F. W. Rhodes.

Rhodes had been brought up in the strict, pious atmosphere of a Victorian family. His father was anxious that Cecil and all his "brothers should enter the Church "as a preliminary step to becoming angels." That proposal, however, never matured, for Cecil caught tuberculosis. The doctor recommended a healthy open-air life to restore his health and he journeyed to South Africa in 1870 to join his eldest brother Herbert, who ran a cotton farm in Natal. Herbert Rhodes left for the diamond-fields soon after, but Cecil, with the dedication to succeed that was to mark all his career, persevered on the soil and brought in a fine cotton crop. The cotton price, however, was poor. In disgust Rhodes took off to join his brother at the diggings.

He set up his tent at De Beers' "New Rush," and reported in a letter to his mother that the place looked like "Stilton cheese." As for the diamonds, they were right on his doorstep. "I found a 17$\frac{6}{16}$ carat on Saturday," he wrote home, "it was very slightly off and I hope to get £100 for it. Yesterday, I found a three and a half perfect stones, but glassy, which I sold for £30. . . . I average £100 a week."

While the majority of diggers had no sense of organization and wandered aimlessly from claim to claim, Rhodes selected his claims carefully and worked them thoroughly. He would sit on an

At 20, Cecil Rhodes entered Oriel College, Oxford, but because of frequent visits to South Africa he took eight years to graduate.

While Rhodes was away in England his partner Charles Rudd kept him in touch with Kimberley and looked after their claim.

In 1895 *Punch* magazine showed "The Colossus of Rhodes" as a mighty figure who pulled the political strings in Africa all the way from the Cape to Cairo.'

upturned bucket, reading Plutarch's *Lives* while waiting for his African workers to bring up more buckets of yellow gravel for him to sort.

He did not make friends easily; there always seemed a shell round him which few could break. People who met him for the first time were sometimes slightly taken aback to find a high-pitched, almost effeminate voice emanating from his huge frame. Everyone called him Rhodes, not Cecil, and he even signed letters to his family with an icy C. J. Rhodes. One acquaintance found him "a compound of moody silence and impulsive action. He was hot tempered and even violent at times but in working towards his ends he laid his plans with care and circumspection." He lived very simply, preferring a grilled chop and onions with floury potatoes eaten out beneath the stars. He was a compulsive gambler, but had little use for women. Occasionally he went to dances in Kimberley, but he always seemed to select the plainest women as his partners.

After a while Rhodes went into partnership with another young Englishman, Charles Rudd, who had been a champion athlete at Harrow and Cambridge before deteriorating health had also made him seek an open-air life in Africa. Rudd proved an ideal partner for the restless Rhodes, who was determined to combine his diamond digging with taking a degree at Oxford. Throughout the eight years from 1873 to 1881 that Rhodes spent commuting between Kimberley and Oriel College, Oxford to complete his degree, Rudd worked on, quietly and competently managing their claims.

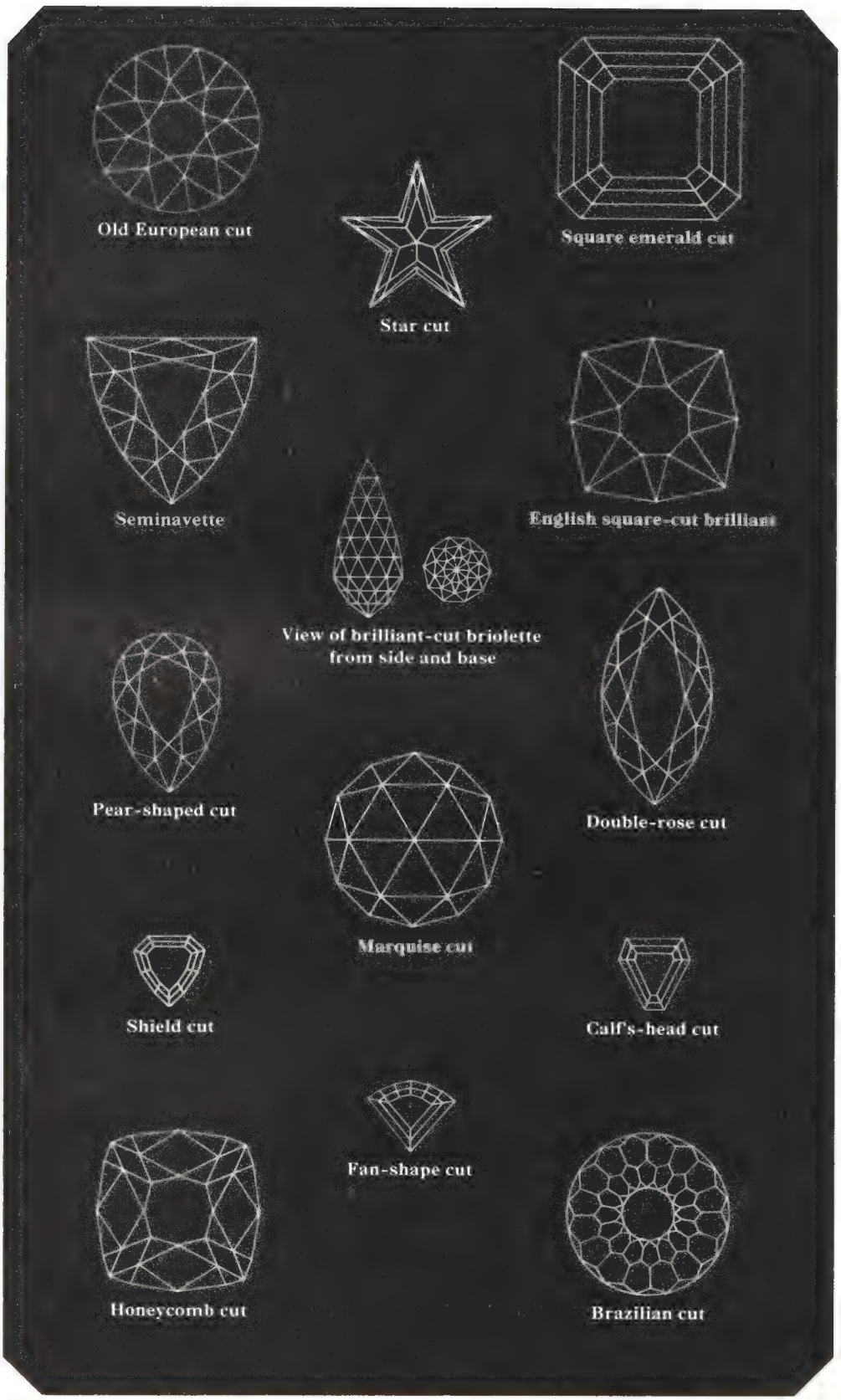
As he travelled between the two strangely contrasted worlds of Kimberley and Oxford, Rhodes was beginning to formulate his grand design for the future. He had already amassed a considerable fortune for a young man (he spent £2,000 on fares alone during his Oxford days), but that was just the bare foundation-stone of the wealth he wanted to fulfil an emerging dream of making not only Africa, but most of the world British. At Oxford one evening he invited some friends to dinner and during dessert made a little speech in which he explained that

"he thought it right for every man, at the beginning of his life, to put an aim before him, and for his part he meant to work for the British Empire." He added: "I contend that we are the first race in the world, and that the more of the world we inhabit, the better it is for the human race. I contend that every acre added to our territory provides for the birth of more of the English race, who otherwise would not be brought into existence. Added to which the absorption of the greater portion of the world under our rule simply means the end of all wars."

As an insurance policy that this aim would be fulfilled if anything happened to him, he wrote a will handing over his entire estate "for the establishment, promotion and development of a Secret Society, the true aim and object whereof shall be the extension of British rule throughout the world." He even hoped that the United States might be brought back into the fold of the Empire.

Henceforth, his whole life was dedicated to this purpose. "If there be a God," he said, "I think what He would like me to do is to paint as much of Africa British-red as possible." A fortune in diamonds was one way of underwriting that goal. "When I am in Kimberley," he once explained, "I often go and sit on the edge of the De Beers Mine, and I reckon up the value of the diamonds in the 'blue' and the power conferred by them. Every foot of the blue ground means so much power."

The discovery of this "blue" ground at Kimberley during Rhodes's Oxford days had changed the character of the diggings dramatically. At first, everyone had assumed the diamonds were all in the first few feet of yellow top-soil. The diggers pitched into their small claims like fury, scooping out the soil without any regard for the danger as pathways between claims were undermined and collapsed. Soon the diggers got down to a flaky blue rock – "Kimberlite" – in which even more diamonds were embedded. While the world's first diamond-fields in India and Brazil, together with the early South African discoveries along the Orange and Vaal rivers, had been scattered deposits in the sands along



Whatever the quality of a diamond in the rough, a cut like one of those shown above, will enhance its value. Each facet has to be polished on to the stone by highly skilled diamond workers at an angle that cannot vary by more than half a degree if symmetry is to be achieved.

river banks, the diamonds on the farms round Kimberley were buried in narrow "pipes" forced up by volcanic action from the centre of the earth. Each pipe was no more than a few hundred feet in diameter, and could be excavated properly only by careful scientific techniques.

For a while the diggers still stuck to individual claims which they reached, as the open pits got deeper and deeper, by buckets and trolleys slung from a web of cables over the diggings.

Anthony Trollope, after viewing the chaotic scene at the Kimberley Big Hole during his 1877 visit, wrote: "It is as though you were looking down into a vast bowl, the sides of which are smooth as should be the sides of a bowl, while round the bottom are various marvellous incrustations among which ants are working with all the unusual energy of the ant-tribe." Trollope felt that it "was as though some diabolically ingenious architect had contrived a house with 500 rooms, not one of which should be on the same floor, and to and from none of which there should be a pair of stairs or a door or a window."

Rhodes was determined to set this house in order. He already had a profitable sideline, the renting of steam pumps to get the water out of flooded claims. Now, he told Charles Rudd, "the time is coming when the small man will have to go. These pits cannot be worked much deeper. We shall have to mine the ground on the largest possible scale. Now is the time to buy."

Fortunately, he could buy, because the Board for the Protection of Mining Industries, which had replaced the Diggers' Committees, removed in 1877 all restrictions on the number of claims one man might hold.

Rhodes and Rudd concentrated on buying out individual owners at what had been the De Beers farm. They soon owned a major share of the claims and in 1880 formed the De Beers Mining Company Limited, with a capital of £200,000.

Consolidation was taking place at all the mines. In 1881, 12 companies owned the entire Kimberley Mine; only ten years earlier there had been 1,600 individual digger-owned claims. By 1885 the four main mines, Kimberley, De Beers, Dorstfontein and Bultfontein were controlled by 42 companies (many of them with interlocking boards of directors) and a sprinkling of private holdings.

Actual size drawings show the sizes most commonly available. Diamonds are weighed in carats: one carat = 1/142nd of an ounce.

As the diamond business became more complex and costly Rhodes and Rudd turned frequently for advice to Alfred Beit. A nervous little man, Beit had first come to Kimberley in 1875 as diamond buyer for Lippert & Co. of Hamburg. Later he became a partner in Jules Porges & Co., the wealthiest diamond merchants in the world. Beit had the financial wizardry Rhodes needed to consolidate his diamond empire.

When they had first met, Rhodes inquired "What's your game?"

"I am going to control the whole diamond output before I am much older," replied Beit.

"That's funny," said Rhodes, "I have made up my mind to do the same. We had better join hands."

Beit's flair for diamonds, Rhodes soon discovered, was uncanny. Once, when a man tried to sell him some stolen diamonds, he identified them immediately as stones that had passed through his hands seven years earlier.

Rhodes, Rudd and Beit had to match their wits with other past masters of the diamond trade who had made their fortunes at Kimberley. There was Francis Baring Gould, who owned a major stake in the Kimberley Mine and could count on his excellent financial connections in London to support his plans for future expansion. Another fierce competitor, Joseph B. Robinson (known as "The Buccaneer"), was a quarrelsome and aggressive man who was envious of Rhodes's success and spent much of his career trying to thwart every project Rhodes embarked on. Above all, there was Barney Barnato, the irrepressible East End music-hall entertainer and boxer turned diamond magnate.

Barnato, the son of a small shopkeeper, was born Barnett Isaacs in Petticoat Lane, London in 1852. He left school at 14 and from then on supported himself through a host of odd jobs. At one time or another he had been a bouncer at the King of Prussia pub, had sold discarded theatre ticket stubs after the first act to gullible bargain hunters and eventually had done a music-hall turn of his own.

When diamonds were discovered in South Africa, his cousin David Harris joined the rush and sent back glowing reports to London of the opportunities there.

Barney's brother Henry was the first to go off; then Barney himself followed the trail to the diggings in 1873. His capital when he arrived consisted of 40 boxes of cigars of doubtful quality, which he hoped to sell at a good profit to the diggers. No one wanted his cigars, so he turned his hand to any job going; at one stage he worked as a boxer at the local circus, taking on all comers. Later he became a *kopje walloper* – an itinerant diamond buyer drifting round the fields buying up diamonds. The legend goes that Barnato made his rounds on an aged pony he bought from another *kopje walloper*; the pony knew the route so well that it always stopped at claims where Barnato might be able to pick up a few stones. Although he lacked any real knowledge of diamonds, he made up for his ignorance with his sunny, genial personality. Diggers were willing to sell to this friendly man even when they

At the exclusive Kimberley Club (above) Cecil Rhodes finally persuaded Barnato over a series of lunches to agree to a merger of their rival diamond-mining concerns.

Rhodes used his fortune to expand the Empire in southern Africa. "I contend we are the first race of the world," he bluntly asserted, "and that the more of the world we inhabit, the better it is for the human race."

Sir Joseph Robinson was, next to Rhodes, Kimberley's richest diamond dealer. Tough, ruthless and intensely unpopular, he as good as bought himself into the Cape Parliament and had himself made Mayor of Kimberley.

Barney Barnato was Kimberley's most flamboyant diamond magnate. A semi-literate London East Ender, he carved out a mining empire that seriously threatened Rhodes's imperial designs.

knew he was offering them a poor price, for they felt he was one of their own.

In the evenings Barney enjoyed himself at the Kimberley Dramatic Society, where he once played Othello. He also fell in love with and married Fanny Bees, a local actress. They had a daughter and two sons (the youngest, Woolf, was a well-known racing driver at Brooklands in the 1920s).

Barnato bought four claims in 1876 very near the centre of the Kimberley "pipe." He and his brother worked like demons, digging ever deeper into the blue ground. Soon he was making £2,000 a week, and formed the Barnato Diamond Mining Company.

Three of his young nephews from the East End, Jack, Woolf and Solly Joel came out to join the growing business and proved themselves to be as adept in diamonds as their uncle. Woolf was a millionaire by the time he was 21.

Like Rhodes, Barnato kept on quietly buying up claims all round. His best coup was to persuade a digger named Stewart to sell him six claims at the heart of the pipe for £180,000. The following year, 1885, Barnato merged his company with Francis Baring Gould's Kimberley Central Mining Company, thus giving him as strong a hold on the Kimberley Mine as Cecil Rhodes had at the De Beers Mine. By then the wealthiest man in diamonds in South Africa, with an income of £200,000 a year, Barnato was a formidable rival for Cecil Rhodes.

Barnato was on the whole content with his diamond empire; he controlled most of the Kimberley Mine, his main rival being the Compagnie Française des Mines de Diamant de Cap de Bon Esperance, which was understandably known to everyone as "The French Company." Barnato felt there was plenty of room in the business for Rhodes and himself. Not so Rhodes, who saw his diamond empire merely as a springboard from which to plan the expansion of a great British Empire that would dominate all of Africa. Control of the whole diamond business, now worth £4,000,000 to £5,000,000 a year, would guarantee him the financial resources required for this grand design.

Rhodes's belief in the benefits of monopoly were strengthened during the mid-1880s by the wildly fluctuating diamond prices that followed the downfall of firms unable to cope with the increasing technical difficulties of diamond mining. At the same time, other firms were cutting prices in an effort to win a larger share of the market. Rhodes was sure that if one company controlled all diamond production, the price of gemstones could be maintained at a highly profitable level by judicious control of the supply of diamonds to the market. Rhodes, whose antipathy to women was well known, enjoyed pointing out that the whole foundation of the diamond's worth was based on the relationship between men and women; as long as they fell in love the future of the diamond was assured. He had even calculated that 4 million diamonds were needed every year for engagement rings. He hoped to supply all 4 million.

Rhodes's ambitious scheme was blocked by the existence of the two companies that together owned the Kimberley Mine: Barnato's Kimberley Central and The French Company.

In 1887 Rhodes began his bid for control of The French Company. Seeking financial support, he travelled to London and approached N.M. Rothschild and Sons, that aristocrat of merchant banking houses. Rothschild's offered him a loan of £1,000,000, whereupon Rhodes bid £1,400,000 for control of The Compagnie Français. Back in Kimberley, Barnato received a cable warning of the deal and promptly topped Rhodes's offer by £300,000. Rhodes was not unduly perturbed. "You can go on bidding *ad infinitum*," he told Barnato, "but we shall have it in the end."

And he did. A compromise was worked out, whereby Rhodes bought The French Company for £1,400,000, his original offer, and immediately sold it to Barnato for a one-fifth stake in Kimberley Central plus £300,000 in cash.

That seemed to leave Barnato in an even stronger position, for he now owned The French Company and retained four-fifths of Kimberley Central. But Rhodes had outwitted him. The one-fifth share in Kimberley Central was the crucial toe-hold Rhodes needed to get hold of the Barnato diamond empire. Rhodes and his associates then began buying up all

Rhodes is shown as the "King of Diamonds" – a tribute to his enormous business acumen.

the other Kimberley Central shares they could corral. Barnato fought back, buying shares at absurd prices himself, so that the price soared from £14 to £49. In vain; some of his principal shareholders could not resist Rhodes's super-salesmanship, for in return for their securities he was offering tempting holdings in the new monopoly he proposed to form.

Rhodes tackled Barnato himself by inviting him to lunch at the Kimberley Club which, for all its exclusiveness was ludicrously housed under a corrugated iron roof. Barney's East End background had disqualified him for membership, but he was far too shrewd to be won over by Rhodes hardly subtle manœuvre. However, after several lunches Barnato began to see Rhodes in a new light. Previously Barnato had felt that Rhodes, with his Oxford degree, was a snob who despised him for his humble beginnings. Now he found Rhodes more sympathetic and he confessed that "the worst of Rhodes is that when you have been with him for half an hour, you not only agree with

him, but you come to believe you have always held his opinion."

It took time, but Rhodes prevailed. The final discussions lasted right through the night at the Kimberley bungalow of Dr. Leander Starr Jameson, a great friend of Rhodes. It must have been a curious encounter. Rhodes, a tall, impressive figure, faced Barnato, who was small and dark, and his nephew Woolf Joel. Barnato, sipping rum and hot milk, listened in a daze as Rhodes pulled out maps and expounded his plans for expansion into Central Africa. Finally, about 4 a.m., he capitulated. He told Woolf: "This is his fad. If it will please him, we'll let him have it." And to Rhodes he said, "Some people have a fancy for one thing, some for another. You want the means to go north, and I think we must give it to you."

In return for promising to merge Kimberley Central with De Beers, Barnato was guaranteed the largest individual shareholding and a Life Governorship in the new De Beers Consolidated Mines, which was incorporated on March 13, 1888.

One final stumbling-block then arose. A handful of Kimberley Central shareholders, unhappy over Barnato's selling out to Rhodes, challenged the merger in the courts. Their case rested on a regulation that Kimberley Central could merge only with another mining company. De Beers Consolidated, the dissident shareholders' counsel pointed out, was not just a diamond-mining company, but, under the terms of its Trust Deed, a huge trading corporation with a franchise to do business in all of Africa. "They can do anything, My Lord," counsel told the judge. "I suppose since the time of the East India Company, no company has had such power as this." The judge agreed. "The powers of the company are as extensive as those of any company that ever existed," he said, and ruled that De Beers and Kimberley Central could not merge.

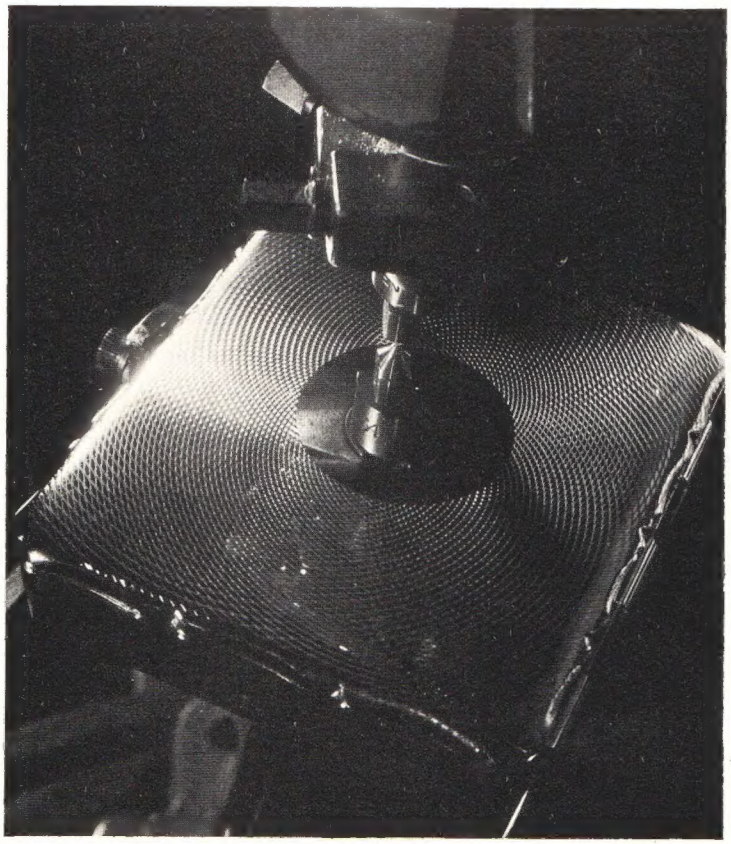
This adverse decision did not delay Rhodes for long. His advisers told him that if Barnato agreed to put Kimberley Central into voluntary liquidation, De Beers could buy its assets. So on July 18, 1889 Cecil Rhodes delivered a cheque for £5,338,650, the largest sum ever covered by one cheque at that time, for the assets of Kimberley Central. Cecil Rhodes, only 35 years old, had won control of 90 per cent of the world's diamond output and, with the resources of De Beers Consolidated Mines behind him, the financial power to proceed with his African ambitions.

Rhodes knew exactly how he wanted to celebrate the event. He is said to have remarked to Barney Barnato: "I've always wanted to see a bucketful of diamonds." Barnato obligingly had a bucket filled with gems. Rhodes plunged in his arms ecstatically and let the diamonds cascade through his fingers. In the years ahead, possessed by a vision, he was to convince himself that he could deal with the huge expanses of central Africa as though they, too, could be placed in a bucket for him to possess and fondle.

The Remarkably Versatile Diamond

Diamonds, because of their physical characteristics, play an extremely significant role in 20th Century industrial activity. Their excellent optical properties, which make diamonds so valuable as gemstones, also make them ideal for use in lenses and optical prisms for high-precision instruments; their thermal and electrical properties lend themselves uniquely well to a variety of electronic applications. And the extreme hardness of diamonds make them unbeatable for use in wear-resistant stylii, such as those used in gramophones, and in ultra-long-life bearings.

Because diamonds are the hardest of all minerals, they have an obvious advantage for use in grinding wheels, saws, lathe tools, wire-drawing dies and a host of other tools. Listed at right are some of the products that diamond-tipped tools help to make. It is far from complete. In fact, diamonds are so important in modern production that it would be difficult to find a manufactured object that did not, at some stage, require diamonds.



A rounded diamond at the tip of this tool pushes into the surface of a powder compact, making a pattern without removing any metal.

Cameras
Ceramic insulators
Contact lenses
Electric fires
Electric motors
Fuses
Hypodermic needles
Jewellery
Laboratory glassware
Lasers
Light bulbs
Moulded plastics
Projectors
Radios
Slates
Spectacles
Surgical instruments
Tape recorders
Telephones
Television sets
Transistors
Valves
Vases
Watches
Windows

Volunteers, 1st and 2nd class, Royal Navy, 1828

IN NEXT WEEK'S ISSUE

THE ZULU WAR